

Midway School Events

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Knowledge Is Power

In July of 1838, leaders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints declared that "Next to worship of God, we esteem the education of our children and of the rising generation." However, such emphasis on education was not new to members of the Church, for the gaining of knowledge and wisdom has always been declared a vital part of life in the revelations of the Lord. They had been taught such doctrines as "The Glory of God is Intelligence"—"Search not for riches, but for wisdom."

It was only logical, then, that the first settlers of Midway would be influenced by the educational ideals of the Church as they lived and worked together to build a new community.

Though they knew how to survive under the rigors of pioneer living, these settlers knew also that the refining influences of life came best through organized schools and in their Church worship. So they built early in their settling days a combination school house and Church building for community use.

The first school in Midway was made of logs, and offered no better facilities than log slabs for seats. Yet, the pupils appreciated what they had and worked diligently on their stone slates to master writing, arithmetic and other school subjects.

Simon Higgenbotham was the first teacher in the school, which was built just west of the present Second Ward chapel site. A stream nearby provided water for the school, and entertainment for the youngsters during recess time. Mr. Higgenbotham's main text was the old Wilson Reader.

When Midway was formed from the upper and lower settlements in 1866, the old log schools were becoming a thing of the past. The people desired more permanent facilities, and so by 1867 a school meeting was called to organize a board of trustees and form a new school. David Van Wagonen, James Lowe and John Huber were elected for a term of two years and instructed to lay plans for building a new school.

The south-east corner lot of the public square was selected as the site of the school, and a tax was voted for the new building, and also for the support of the school. Each family was to furnish one-half cord of rock at the building site. The school ledger for 1867 to 1869 indicates that money was difficult to raise. However, many people paid their taxes with lumber, potatoes, wheat, wood, shingles, by mending windows,

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Jessie Hunt, Emma Abbott and Sarah E. Jones. These teachers usually boarded with Midway residents.

The New West school was first held in the Van Wagoner Amusement Hall, a large frame building just south of the John Van Wagoner, Sr., home. It had been built by David Van Wagoner as a recreation hall.

In spite of its free tuition, the New West School began to drop in attendance after a few years, and by 1889 it was closed down.



Midway's New West School conducted in Van Wagoner Hall in 1886

A few private schools also existed in Midway during the 1880's. Mrs. Elizabeth Alexander conducted a summer school for about eight or ten pupils who were too young to work on the farms. Mrs. Mary Bronson also had a school in her home. Another private tutor was Sarah Woods, a sister of Mrs. Bronson.

Other private schools were organized to teach specific subjects, and generally were open to anyone interested. Leo Haeferli conducted a writing school in the old German Hall, a building just north of the public square. This was conducted in the evening, and pupils brought their own writing materials and copy books. John Huber taught a music singing class and writing also in the evening.

Attewall Wootton, in addition to his day-school activities, also organized a night school for young married people and other adults to study civics, debating, music, dramatics and to engage in wholesome recreation and open forums.

Other community residents furthered their education by attending evening lectures given by prominent individuals. One such lecturer was a Professor Clegg, an English phrenologist who settled in Heber.

Many of the talented young people in Midway took advantage of state colleges or Church schools in other areas to further their training. Some of the first to leave home to attend college were John, Mary and Emma Huber, the eldest children of John Huber, who was secretary of the school board. They went to Provo where they attended the Brigham Young Academy. Jacob Probst also attended there. Jerry Springer, Reese Clayburn and Nymphus Watkins were some of the first to attend school at the Utah Agricultural College in Logan, where they were naval cadets.

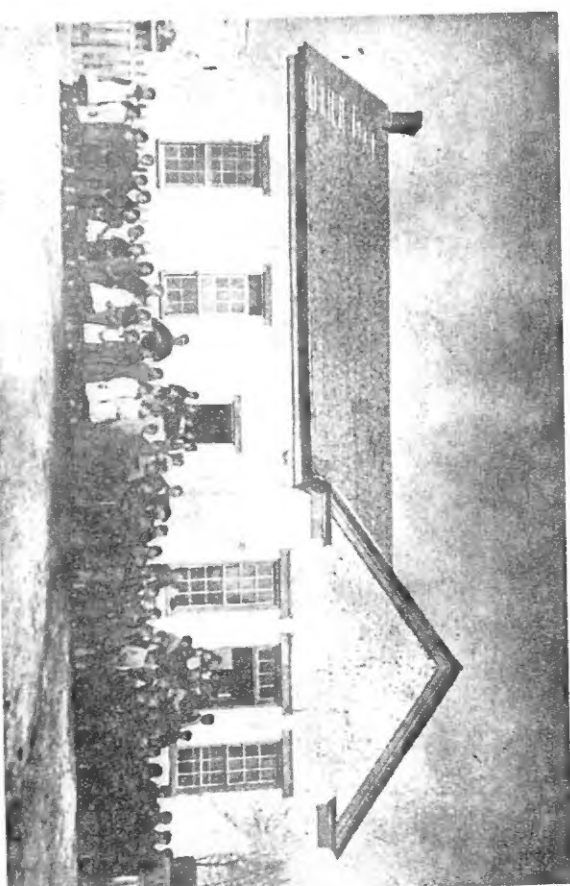


Jerry Springer, Naval cadet at Utah Agricultural College in Logan about 1900.

By 1889 the Wasatch Stake Academy had been established by the Church in the new Stake House in Heber, and many Midway students attended the academy for secondary and religious education.

In 1890, the superintendent of schools issued a report on territorial and local school taxes, which showed that Midway was assessed territorial taxes of \$1,116.36, county taxes of \$352.80 and local taxes of \$708.56, or a total of \$2,177.72 in taxes. This tax was based on \$4.43 territorial taxes per pupil and \$1.40 county tax for each pupil. This would indicate that there were 252 pupils attending the Midway schools in 1890.

This large enrollment at the school made the school building very inadequate, and so it was decided that enlargement was necessary. The remodeling included addition of a second story to the school and a large room for higher departments. This made three rooms available in the school, which by now had three teachers. Attewall Wootton, Sr., continued as principal, even though he was also superintendent of schools. With the remodeling came also new school equipment, including the latest models of globes, microscopes, physiological charts, geometric forms,



Students of the Midway School in the early 1880's are photographed outside their school building. Teachers at the time were Attewall Wootton Sr. and Attewall Wootton Jr.

geography charts and maps. "Commodious and neat" desks were also furnished.

Leo Haeffel, a former teacher and newspaper correspondent, wrote at the time, "I defy any school district of the same size or even a good many considerably larger to show better educational facilities than are at present furnished to the people of this ward. That these facilities, gratuitous tuition, and sufficient teachers, staff-graded classes, excellent apparatus, convenient rooms have been appreciated by the people of Midway is evident by the fact that out of a legal population of about 270, the opening days of the mid-winter term found an enrollment of about 240, despite the inclement weather. True at the time of the high water tide in the spell of epidemic, the attendance fell off considerably, temporarily more than 60 per cent in the primary department, but the worst is over and the school grounds are reassuming their wanted air of vivacity about the hour when the bell's brazen tongue summons the little and big scholars to their desks and tasks."

In another newspaper column, Mr. Haeffel indicates that school children are perhaps the same from generation to generation. He wrote: "The other day one boy hurt another quite seriously by holding a freshly sharpened lead pencil under him, just as the school mate was about to resume his seat at the desk. Such tomfoolery cannot be reprimanded too severely nor suppressed too promptly."

School teachers of the 1890's were expected to improve themselves

in training, as is evident from the agenda of one meeting of the Wasatch County Education Assn.

With Supt. Wootton in charge, the agenda was as follows:

- (1) A report of a committee appointed to select a list of books to be approved by the members as fit literature to be added to the library;
- (2) A special lecture by Leo Haeffel on the Absurdity of Trying to Make the English Language Fit the Latin Grammar;
- (3) Exercise by E. D. Clyde in using the teachers as a class to illustrate his method of teaching multiplication of common fractions;
- (4) General discussions by members on declension of the English noun;
- (5) Subject of percentages.

Trustees of the schools were also expected to attend these meetings along with the teachers.

When Utah became a state in 1896 it was necessary by law to elect a new school board and C. I. Bronson, John Huber and John Van Wagoner were voted to three, two and one-year terms respectively. Their salary was \$20 per year.

At the first meeting of the new board, they engaged Attewall Wootton as teacher of the grammar grades and principal for \$75 per month, William T. Wootton, intermediate department, \$50 per month; J. E. Morton, second primary, \$50; and Simon Epperson, Primary Department, \$50. In addition to the three rooms in the school house, the Swiss-German Hall was rented for \$5 per month. Custodian at the main building was Louis Coleman, who was paid \$12.50 per month. Andrew Burgener was paid \$5 per month to care for the Swiss-German Hall.

By 1898 the "growing pains" had seriously affected the Midway educational program. Teachers were handling 50 or more pupils each day in crowded, inadequate classrooms.

The school board subsequently called a meeting to discuss the crowded conditions, but the proposals failed to obtain a majority vote, and so they continued on as they had the past year.

By 1900 the school board obtained a vote to proceed with an entirely new school building. They purchased the property north of the present school for \$168.75 from the Midway Town Corporation in February of 1901.

Architect John Boss was asked to draw plans and make estimates for a new building with four rooms. In a meeting of the taxpayers in March, the clerk reported that the school district had \$512 in material and about \$900 in cash to begin the new building. The taxpayers voted a tax of one-half of one per cent to bring in about \$800 more so that at least two rooms could be ready for occupancy by the winter term. Plans for a six-room school were also discussed, but after some discussion were abandoned.

Work then began in earnest, with the board offering \$1.50 per day

to laborers, and \$2.50 per day for laborers with teams of horses. Fred Haueter obtained the masonry bid and John Van Wagoner was requested to obtain the materials and supervise the work. Andrew Johnson was hired for the carpentry work and given authority to hire what help he needed.

More money was needed, however, to finish the building and furnish it, so the taxpayers voted to bond the district for \$2,000 for five years.

On November 25, 1901, without dismissing school, the classes moved into the new building. The grammar grades moved into the south room, upstairs, with T. B. Miller as principal and teacher. The third primary occupied the north room upstairs with Miss Stella Rasmussen as teacher. Miss Rose Shore taught second primary in the north room downstairs and the first primary occupied the south room downstairs with Miss Mary E. Abeglen as teacher. The intermediate grades continued to meet in the old school building with Charles E. Bronson as teacher.



The first graduating class of the Midway School to have formal graduation exercises. Shown in this 1905 group are, seated, left to right, Alfred Sharp, Nellie Provost, Theo B. Miller, teacher, Ora Galli and Charles Bonner. Standing are Iva Bunnell, Eliza Bronson, Nancy Van Wagoner and Ellen Wilson.

The new building cost some \$5,500 to build. Some of the surplus rock and other materials were sold to provide money for furnishings, a fence and badly needed books.

In 1904 the first students were graduated from the new school's eighth grade program. The four graduates were Myrtle Abplanalp, Belle Wilson, David Clayburn and David J. Wilson.

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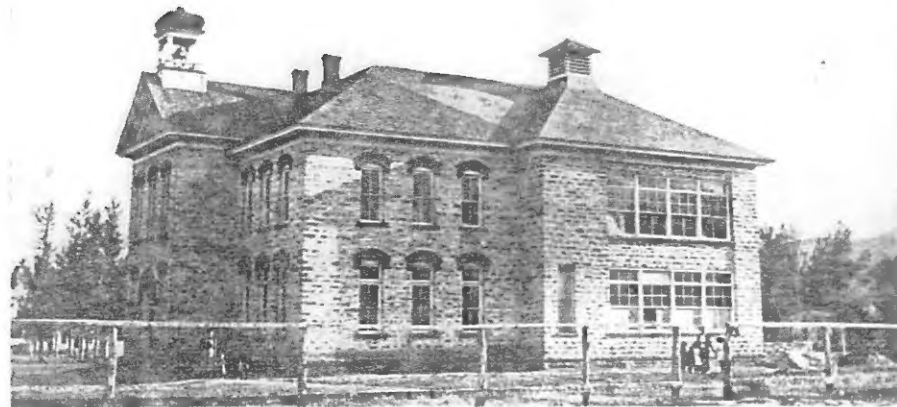


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The Midway School, constructed of native rock in 1912 and still in use today.

Wasatch County form a high school of its own. He showed the people that they were paying enough in sending their children away to complete their education to support one of the finest high schools in the state.

His dream came true in 1908 when the various school boards in the county approved consolidation and formation of a high school district. The people voted overwhelmingly in favor of local high school instruction and a new board was elected to lay plans for the school. C. I. Bronson and George A. Huntington of Midway were elected to serve on the first board, which was headed by Supt. Orson Ryan.

Since that time, students from Midway have continued their education at Wasatch High School which is located in Heber City.

"Growing pains" were felt in Midway schools again by 1910, and so it was decided to issue bonds totaling \$7,000 for building, furnishing and equipping an addition to the school building.

In constructing the addition, the board allowed \$4.50 per cord of rock, \$1.25 per load of sand, \$2.00 per day for common labor, \$2.50 for powder and drilling, and \$3.50 per day for team work. H. G. Blumenthal was awarded the heating plant bid for \$3,375, while George A. Wootton and Anton Olson received the bids on the carpentry work, materials, completing and furnishing everything but the masonry work and heating plant. Their bid was \$6,985.

It was on March 22, 1912 that the people accepted a proposition by Midway Town to exchange the old school house and lot for one-half of the public square joining the new building. The new sturdy school house, built of native rock, is still serving the needs of the people of Midway today.

Formation of the Wasatch County School Board in 1915 eliminated the need for individual community boards and so the Midway board was abandoned. Some of those who served on the board included David

Van Wagoner, James Lowe, Jeremiah Robey, Alvah J. Alexander, C. I. Bronson, John Huber, John Van Wagoner, Simon Epperson, William L. Van Wagoner, Frederick Hasler, John Watkins, Mark Smith, Attewall Wootton, Jacob Burgener, Conrad Abegglen, George Wardle, George Dabling and Jesse McCarrell.

Since the county school district has been organized, Midway has been represented by the following board members: C. I. Bronson, J. A. Wootton, William L. Van Wagoner, Reed Kohler, Charles Buehler, Fay Van Wagoner and Irvin Bowden.

Principals of the Midway School have included Attewall Wootton Sr., Theodore B. Miller, Thomas Higgs, E. M. Isaacson, James Sorenson, L. S. McQuarrie, Clark Crook, John Pendleton, Karl Probst, Clarence Probst and Mark Rasband.

Some who will be remembered as teachers in Midway schools, in addition to those already named, include Joseph Forbes who lived in the fort string and was one of the early teachers, George Wootton, Attewall Wootton Jr., David Wootton, Dermont Huffaker, Mrs. Oscar (Ida Murdock) Kirkham, Mrs. Lavina Christensen Fugal, who was American Mother of 1955, Charles E. Bronson, Ira Jacobs, Sarah Wood, Moroni Gerber, Lizzie Lindsay, a Mr. Nugent and a Mr. Phelps.

As Wasatch County's second century begins there is every reason to believe that Midway's future educational efforts will be characterized by the same vision, courage and untiring efforts that have been exhibited since pioneer times.